

The Footprints of My Conscience

By Shirley M. Haws

There are some question in a person's life that are never answered. Don't get me wrong. I know I was stealing, and I know very well that it wasn't right. The one thing I don't know is, was I caught? Maybe you can help me.

It all happened back in 1951, while I was working, during the summer at the swimming resort called Saratoga. The resort wasn't like it is today. Then it was just two swimming pools, a counter containing the cash register and a few notions, and a refreshment stand. I worked in the refreshment stand selling greasy hamburgers and warm drinks. The one glorious thing about working at Saratoga was that before the pools opened in the morning, the kids who worked there could swim for nothing. I was in the pool by 7:30 every morning. This is where my deed was concocted.

My partner in crime was a girl named "Something" Mae. I can't remember what should replace the something, and I hope I never see her again to find out. She was a short, blond girl, a year younger than I. She had a tiny, jagged scar on the side of her chin. I always wondered what had caused it, but never dared ask.

I'm sure it must have been her idea. I never would have thought of such a dastardly deed. It didn't matter who thought of it, there we were, all alone in the whole building, getting into the glass case at the ticket counter. I know just what I took: a package of bobby pins, and a tube of lipstick. I remember so well the feeling of a million eyes watching me and a million fingers pointing at me as I hid them under my swim suit. I ran to my overnight case where I kept my clothes, put them at the very bottom, locked the case, and hurried back to the pool.

Mae sauntered out to the outside pool, singing all the way. I tried to swim in

the inside pool. I couldn't; I had a sickish, empty feeling in my stomach. I went to the side of the pool and just stood there. The feeling was getting worse. I remember thinking that if I could throw up I'd feel better. I heard footsteps coming and someone whistling. I was Mick, our boss. He whistled all the time, except when he was mad. His footsteps were getting louder! He was coming in! I had to hide! I just knew if he saw my face, he'd surely know! I didn't hide, I just stood there in the water. He didn't say a word, he just got some papers and left.

That's when I decided what I had to do. I had to put them back! I ran back to my overnight case, unlocked it, and reached under my clothes for the stolen goods. I was just a few feet from the showcase. Footsteps! Someone was coming! I panicked and ran back to the pool! I was shaking and out of breath. I sat down on the top step to rest. The footsteps and the whistling started again. He was coming in. Just then I looked up. WET FOOTPRINTS! They were leading right to the lipstick and bobby pin counter! I wanted to die! He was in. The steps stopped, so did the whistling. All he said was, "Hm, whose footprints?"

For weeks after, I'd wake up at night in a cold sweat from the same dream. Wet footsteps followed me wherever I went!

As I said, there are some questions in a person's life that are never answered. Can you help me? Did I get caught, or were they just the footprints of my conscience?